

Ioannes Scotus Erigena
(c. 810-880)

**PREFACE TO PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS,
DE HIERARCHIA CAELESTI
(PL 122:1032)
[9th Century]**

Though I, a mere beginner in Greek studies, was neither willing nor able to decline your request, I admit—and of what can I be too ashamed to admit to your Highness—that, even with the help of Him, who is the light of the spirit and illuminates what is hidden in the darkness, it was beyond my powers to translate from Greek into Latin the four books of our holy father, Dionysius the Areopagite, bishop of Athens, which he wrote to Timothy, bishop of Ephesus, and his ten letters. I think of his book as prolix, very far from modern sensibilities, impenetrable to many, open to few, not only because of its antiquity but also because of the depth of its heavenly mysteries...

[...]

So, no matter its quality, I would think my translation does not need a long justification: whoever they are, or whatever they are like, we can easily answer all its rivals: that we could not and should not refuse to accede to your Highness's orders. If there is any objection to an expression that is too heavy or too unusual, let it be understood that nothing else is acceptable, not only to me but also to Him who has distributed the proper qualities to each person as He sees fit. But if the general tenor of my version should be judged obscure and unclear, let it be recognised that I am the translator of this work, not the person who expounds it. And for that reason I am afraid that I will incur the blame due to the "faithful translator". And if it appears that something superfluous is added or something is missing from the wholeness of the original, let my critic look to the Greek text I worked from; and the chances are that he will find that it is as I have written. I thought that this would be the right course for me, to leave aside the conjectures of others and submit to the judgment of my author alone, to whom I must bend.
